

Gulf War Guinea Pigs

Tens of thousands of Gulf War veterans, their spouses and children are victims of the US military's experimental drug programs.

Vaccines could well be to blame for their shocking symptoms.

by Neil Z. Miller, © 1995

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*Immunization Theory vs Reality:
Exposé on Vaccinations*
Published by New Atlantean Press
PO Box 9638
Santa Fe, NM 87504, USA
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On 16 May 1994, *Newsweek* published a compelling article on the mysterious Gulf War Syndrome. Evidently, thousands of US military personnel who served in the Gulf War are now seriously incapacitated from unknown causes. For example, after one veteran returned from his stint of duty as an army platoon leader in the Persian Gulf, his health began to deteriorate. The trouble started with spots on his legs, which soon spread to other parts of his body. Then his eyes swelled shut and his lips bloated until the skin split. When his skin cleared up, his joints ached.¹⁰⁰

After returning from the Persian Gulf War, another veteran developed flu-like symptoms, with fever, aching joints and swollen lymph nodes. During the next three years he got progressively worse. He became unsteady on his feet and increasingly tired. He suffered frequent headaches and often became disoriented, losing his way home from common locations. Today he uses a wheelchair to get around, cannot work, drive, open a soft drink can or stay awake long enough to read a book.¹⁰¹

A naval reservist developed non-Hodgkins lymphoma (cancer) after returning from a six-month tour of duty in the Persian Gulf. He has since documented 86 lymphomas among fellow soldiers.¹⁰²

A few months later, the true extent of Gulf War damage was revealed. Little by little the facts seeped into the public eye. Nearly 20,000 Gulf War veterans are stricken with debilitating illnesses: bleeding rashes, gums and sinuses, muscle aches, swollen joints, chronic fatigue, diarrhoea, hair loss, severe headaches and memory loss. Also, over time the symptoms tend to become more acute. Many vets are now confined to wheelchairs and hospital beds.¹⁰³

In addition, the syndrome appears to be contagious. Many veterans, their spouses, and scientists believe it can be passed through sex or sweat, or that it's airborne. Apparently, veterans' wives and their unborn babies are being damaged as well. According to Michigan Senator Donald Riegel, Jr, of the 600 vets his office surveyed, 77 per cent say their spouses have the symptoms, 65 per cent say their postwar babies are damaged, and 25 per cent report that their children born before the war have new debilitating illnesses as well. According to one medical researcher, "This is an epidemic. This is absolutely comparable to AIDS."¹⁰⁴

Many Gulf War couples also report they are no longer able to make love. Intercourse causes the women to experience immediate abdominal cramping, and intense burning sensations as though their genitals were being torched. For many, their labias crack and bleed. Also, the semen burns both husband and wife within minutes of contact with skin. It causes open sores—blisters that bleed.¹⁰⁵

Many Gulf War families are being advised against pregnancy. Babies are being born with extra toes and fingers, undeveloped lungs and missing body parts. One child was born with an oversized umbilical cord that wrapped around his body six times, nearly strangling him. This child appears to be developmentally delayed and exhibits other debilitating symptoms similar to his father's. Another child was born without a thyroid gland. She also has dozens of tumours all over her body and inside her mouth. Still another child has intermittent vaginal bleeding.¹⁰⁶

One Gulf War spouse had two miscarriages in the year after her husband's return from the Gulf. She complains of headaches, rashes and frequent vaginal infections. In a third pregnancy, a son was delivered two months prematurely. The child required three months of intensive care and numerous painful operations. He now has vision and hearing problems, a lung ailment and cerebral palsy. This woman has subsequently miscarried again.¹⁰⁷

Another Gulf War spouse has lumps, rashes, and cysts throughout her body. Her skull is thinning, threatening to destroy her brain. She has splitting headaches and painful genital infections. Their son is sick as well.¹⁰⁸ The list appears endless.

THE CAUSE

Although speculation on the roots of this dilemma ranged from pesticides and burning oil wells to undetected Iraqi nerve gases, American troops are the only ones suffering. British, Canadian, Saudi, and Iraqi personnel are relatively unaffected.¹⁰⁹ Even though the *Newsweek* article and other media sources refrained from suggesting vaccines as a potential cause, it awoke the nation to a national dilemma: how to support our vets who unquestionably (and unquestioningly) served their country.

On 6 May 1994 (ten full days before the *Newsweek* article was published), the truth was told. In an opening statement at a Hearing before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Senator John D. Rockefeller, IV shared with members of the committee the results of his extensive investigation into the roots of the problem. Here are a few excerpts from that meeting:

OPENING STATEMENT
Senator John D. Rockefeller, IV, Chair
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

Hearing:

**"Is Military Research Hazardous to Veterans' Health?
Lessons from the Cold War, the Persian Gulf, and Today"**

"A few months ago, Americans were shocked to learn that our government had intentionally exposed thousands of US citizens to radiation without their knowledge or consent. Although many of us expressed horror at the apparently unethical behaviour of our government, we were all relieved to hear that such experiments had been stopped long ago.

"We'd like to think that these kinds of abuses are a thing of the past, but the legacy continues. During the Persian Gulf War, hundreds of thousands of soldiers were given experimental vaccines and drugs, and today we will hear evidence that these medical products could be causing many of the 'mysterious illnesses' those veterans are now experiencing...

"Today's hearing will examine the results of an intensive 6-month investigation conducted by Committee staff. The investigation focuses on Persian Gulf War veterans, but extends from World War II-era veterans to the present.

"The results of our investigation showed a reckless disregard that shocked me, and I think they will shock all Americans. The use of investigational drugs in the Persian Gulf is especially troublesome. The Pentagon...threw caution to the winds, ignoring all warnings of potential harm, and gave these drugs to hundreds of thousands of soldiers with virtually no warnings and no safeguards.

"If that wasn't bad enough, they administered these drugs and vaccines in such a way that there is a very good chance they wouldn't have even worked for the intended purpose. They would not have protected most soldiers from chemical or biological warfare.

"These are strong statements and I don't make them lightly.

"The situation is unfair from start to finish. It begins with soldiers who are asked to participate in research, to take experimental drugs, but are not told what the risks are before, during, or after.

"Then, information about the exposures is not included in soldiers' medical records, putting them at even greater risk. And, when these soldiers leave the service and become veterans, the VA lacks information about the exposures, and about any resulting illnesses, making it more difficult to help them.

"Finally, when these veterans become ill, they are unable to get the medical records and other information they need in order to prove that their illnesses are related to military service.

"This situation is unacceptable."¹¹⁰

Senator Rockefeller credited his information to an extensive investigation conducted by Committee staff. Here are excerpts from their discoveries:

PRELIMINARY STAFF FINDINGS

"Is Military Research Hazardous to Veterans' Health? Lessons from the Persian Gulf"

INTRODUCTION

"For more than 50 years, hundreds of thousands of military personnel have been involved in human experimentation and other intentional exposures conducted by the Department of Defense (DoD), often without soldiers' knowledge or consent. Our May 6, 1994 hearing examines the extent to which these exposures endangered individuals who are now veterans, and explores the implications for soldiers and veterans today...

"US troops [in the Persian Gulf War] were intentionally exposed to investigational drugs and vaccines... In still other cases, soldiers were exposed to biological agents or other dangerous substances that DoD was studying; the goal was to study the substances, not their effect on humans...

"Some of the studies that have been conducted had more questionable motives. For example, DoD now admits they conducted "Man Break" tests, exposing soldiers to chemical weapons in order to determine how much was necessary to "break a man". Similarly, DoD admits that they subjected hundreds/thousands of soldiers to hallucinogens without their knowledge or consent, in an effort to determine how incapacitating those substances could be. Most Americans would agree that the use of soldiers as guinea pigs in experiments that were designed to harm them...is not ethical.

"These experiences put hundreds of thousands of US troops at risk, and may have caused lasting harm to many individuals.

"In this report, we will examine how decisions made by DoD regarding the use of investigational drugs and vaccines in the Persian Gulf War were based on inadequate information and in some cases by ignoring evidence that soldiers would be harmed unnecessarily. We will also discuss how the DoD's failure to provide medical treat-

ment or information to soldiers was unjustifiable, unethical, sometimes illegal, and caused unnecessary suffering.

"In addition, information about the use of these investigational drugs and vaccines, and adverse reactions that resulted, usually were not included in soldiers' medical records. As a result, veterans who became ill following the use of these medical products are often unable to prove that their illness or disability was related to their military service."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

"A few months ago, Americans were shocked to learn that Federal agencies had intentionally exposed thousands of US citizens to radiation without their knowledge or consent. Although many Americans expressed horror at the apparently unethical behaviour of the Federal government, many believed such experiments occurred in a bygone era with less stringent ethical standards.

"Post-Holocaust Standards of Research: The Nuremberg Code is a 10-point declaration governing human experimentation which was developed in response to the inhumane experiments conducted by Nazi scientists and physicians. The Code states that voluntary and informed consent is absolutely essential at all times, wartime included. Additionally, current law prevents funds appropriated to the Department of Defense from being used for research involving a human being as an experimental subject unless the informed consent of the subject is obtained in advance...

"The Nuremberg Code should have guided the experiments whereby LSD and other hallucinogens were given to military servicemen in the 1950s without their knowledge or consent; howev-

er, those studies were kept secret until the mid-1970s. Similarly, the Nuremberg Code should have prevented hundreds of radiation experiments that several Federal agencies conducted on thousands of soldiers, veterans, and civilians during the Cold War without their knowledge or consent; however, those studies continued for years and were never made public until a few months ago."

"...information about the use of these investigational drugs and vaccines, and adverse reactions that resulted, usually were not included in soldiers' medical records. As a result, veterans who became ill following the use of these medical products are often unable to prove that their illness or disability was related to their military service."

INVESTIGATIONAL DRUGS AND VACCINES IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Under the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act, all vaccines and medical products must be proven safe and effective by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in order to be sold and distributed in the United States.

DoD/FDA Agreements to Waive Informed Consent for Investigational Drugs During the Persian Gulf War

"In August 1990, DoD contacted FDA to review regulatory restrictions on DoD's plan to use pyridostigmine and botulism vaccine for US troops in the Persian Gulf.

According to minutes of the meeting, "FDA expressed some concern about liability and the need to comply with the regulations" and Dr Peck, FDA's Deputy Director for Drug Review, "pointed out the need to establish an appropriate investigational framework to collect observational data and evaluate the military medical products in question".

"The major focus of the meeting was informed consent. In summary, DoD did not want to abide by informed consent regulations, and FDA officials pointed out that pyridostigmine and botulism vaccine were investigational and that there are laws regulating how they can be used. DoD claimed that they had the authority to

Figure 1:
Veterans who received no disclosure on vaccines.

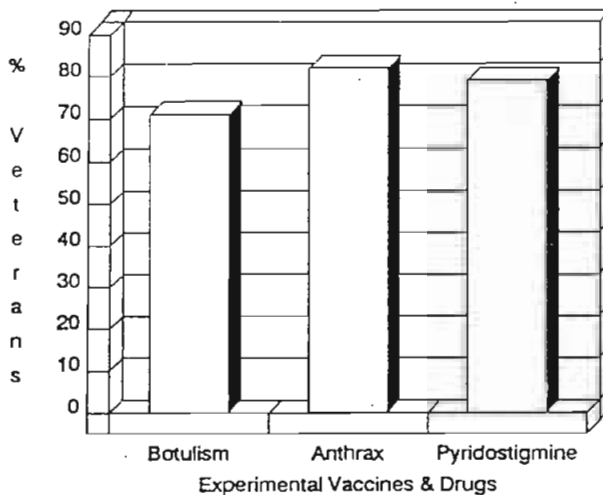
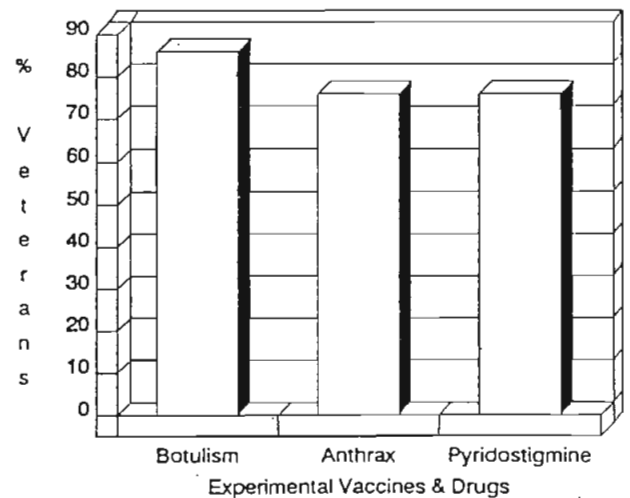


Figure 2:
Veterans who could not refuse vaccines.



"dictate the use of unapproved FDA-regulated products" in the Persian Gulf, but they would prefer to obtain a waiver from FDA.

"The issue was debated by the two agencies for several months. Finally, at a meeting on December 31, 1990, it appeared that an agreement was reached. DoD officials agreed that the vaccine would be administered by trained individuals with a health care background, and that information would be provided orally "at minimum, and in written form if feasible, to all personnel receiving the vaccine". DoD officials said the feasibility of distributing an information sheet would depend on many factors, and would vary from location to location within the military theatre of operation. DoD officials "reiterated that at least verbal information would be provided to each person receiving the vaccine". The FDA Informed Consent Waiver Review Group recommended that pregnant women be excluded from receiving the vaccine and that information about the vaccine be "posted at places where vaccine is administered". However, DoD argued that pregnant women would be at greater risk from exposure to botulism toxins than to the vaccine, and FDA agreed that instead of excluding pregnant women, a statement would be added to the recipient information stating that, "If you are pregnant, it is not known if this vaccine will hurt the unborn baby; however, most vaccines do not."

"Despite these agreements between FDA and DoD, and DoD's official subsequent decision to administer the vaccine voluntarily, many PGW veterans claim that they were not told what vaccine they were being given, or what the risks were, either orally or in writing [See Figures 1 and 2]. Many report that they were told not to tell medical personnel that they had received a vaccination, even if the vaccination caused pain or swelling. No record of the vaccine was available in medical records; as a result, physicians who were concerned about any local or systemic reactions were uninformed about the possible causes. Veterans who claim they were harmed by the vaccine or pyridostigmine frequently have no proof that they were vaccinated or took the pills, or that they had an adverse reaction. Moreover, virtually none of the soldiers received more than two of the botulism vaccinations, even though DoD informed DA they would administer the three shots necessary for protection...

"On January 8, 1991, Dr David Kessler, FDA Commissioner, wrote to the Assistant Secretary of Health of DoD regarding the waiver for informed consent... In his letter, Dr Kessler agreed that since there was "no available satisfactory alternative therapy" for

protection...he would "concur with your assessment that informed consent is not feasible".

"Since the end of the Persian Gulf War, DoD has repeatedly requested that the waiver of informed consent be made permanent, arguing that "to not finalise it provides an arguable defect under the Administrative Procedures Act and leaves both DoD and FDA open to greater liability". To finalise the interim rule would grant unrestricted use of investigational drugs by military personnel, even when efficacy and safety have not been established."¹¹

SURVEY OF 146 PERSIAN GULF WAR VETERANS

"In the early months of 1994, staff of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs interviewed 146 Persian Gulf War veterans... The respondents complained about numerous negative side-effects of the vaccines and pills... One claimed that two people in his unit had heart attacks after taking [the experimental drugs] and that one died. There were numerous complaints about the quality of care and the lack of compassion of VA physicians and nurses. This included a doctor's comment claiming that the Persian Gulf War "wasn't a real war", and a patient's complaint that a doctor told her that she was fine, after using a stethoscope that he had forgotten to put in his ears."¹²

"Here are a few selected comments from the survey:

On Medical Records:

- Seven months of medical records are missing.
- Asked for my medical record and was told all had been disposed of.
- Medical record is lost forever.
- Twenty years of medical records are now mysteriously gone.
- All our medical records were destroyed.
- Doctors refused to put vaccinations in my medical record.
- Was told my leave would be held up if I wanted copies of my medical record.
- My medical record says my illness is not related to Agent Orange.
- This VA doctor has the wrong war!

On Vaccinations:

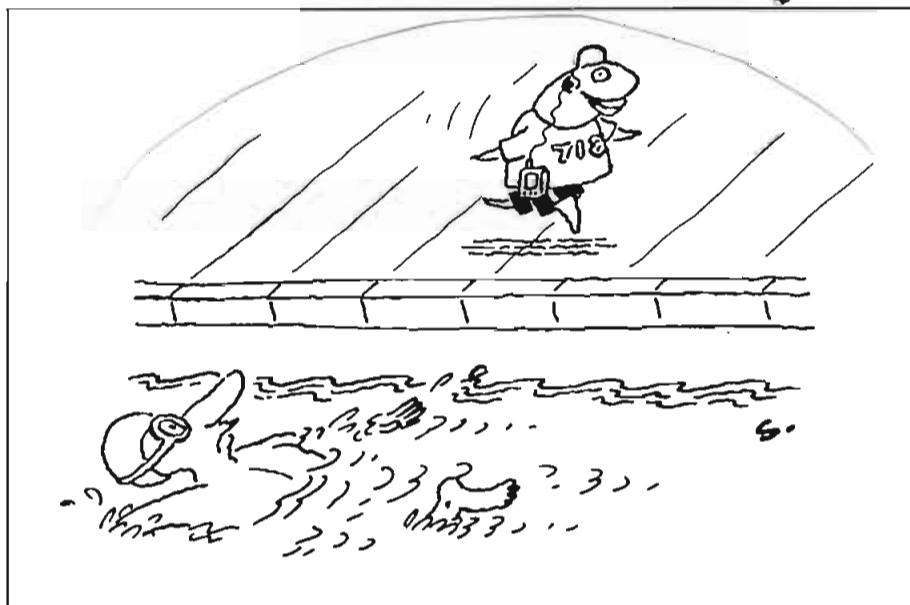
- Passed out after anthrax shot.
- We were told not to tell we got anthrax shots because there wasn't enough for British and French troops.
- Several reported flu symptoms at time of vaccinations.
- I argued that I was pregnant, so finally they let me not take the shot.
- It was a big argument.
- They made me sign something, but the form was folded so I couldn't read what I signed.
- We were ordered to sign the consent form.
- I could refuse the shot if I wanted court martial.
- I tried to refuse anthrax and was threatened with Leavenworth.

On the VA Hospital System and Doctors:

- Military doctors are harassing me because I'm sick.
- VA doctors don't want to know what is making you sick.
- VA is minimising our illnesses.
- Navy doctors told my wife to terminate her pregnancy.

On Illnesses:

- Lots of men in the unit have swollen testicles.
- Sometimes I forget to feed my son.
- I got lost while going to get my children from school.
- I don't have a spleen and wonder if I should have taken those drugs and vaccines."¹³



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Reproductive Dysfunction:

Additional confirmation regarding the potential damage inflicted on Gulf War personnel—and insight into the magnitude of the problem—continues to accrue. For example, on 5 August 1994,

United States General Accounting Office released testimony given before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Here are a few brief excerpts:

OPERATION DESERT STORM

POTENTIAL FOR REPRODUCTIVE DYSFUNCTION IS NOT BEING ADEQUATELY MONITORED

**Statement of Kwai-Cheung Chan, Issue Area Director
Program Evaluation and Methodology Division**

"We are here today to present our report on possible reproductive dysfunction among the US armed forces who served in the Persian Gulf War. Since their return from the war in the Persian Gulf, many veterans have complained of a variety of health problems including reports of an increased number of birth defects and other reproductive problems. It is now known that before, during, and after the war, US troops were exposed to a variety of potentially hazardous substances. These include but are not limited to...investigational drugs and vaccines.

"Questions remain unanswered concerning the potential reproductive and developmental dysfunction that may have occurred..."¹¹⁴

Despite vaccine propaganda claiming the shots are safe and effective, consumers should beware of these potentially dangerous drugs and the unscrupulous forces pressing for our conformity. If you're still unsure as to the safety of vaccines and immunisations, seek out additional information until you're positive the decision you are making is yours alone, and is the right one. ∞

(Editor's Note: It has since come to light that over 500 UK Gulf War veterans are seeking compensation for Gulf War Syndrome. A news item screened on ABC TV's World At Noon, 28 February 1995, indicated that the vaccines and immunisations received by the soldiers were the chief suspected culprits for GWS.)

Footnotes:

100. Geoffrey, Cowley, et al., "Tracking the Second Storm", *Newsweek*, 16 May 1994, p. 56.
101. David Brown, "Diagnosis Unknown: Gulf War Syndrome", *The Washington Post*, 26 July 1994, p. A1.
102. See Note 100.
103. David France, "The Families Who Are Dying For Our Country", *Redbook*, September 1994, p. 116.
104. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17, 148.
105. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.
106. *Ibid.*, pp. 114+.
107. See Note 101, p. A8.
108. See Note 103, p. 117.
109. See Note 100, p. S7.
110. Senator John D. Rockefeller, IV, Chair, "Is Military Research Hazardous to Veterans' Health? Lessons from the Cold War, the Persian Gulf and Today", Opening Statement, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, United States Senate, 6 May 1994.
111. Diana Zuckerman, Ph.D. and Patricia Olson, D.V.M., Ph.D., "Is Military Research Hazardous to Veterans' Health? Lessons from the Persian Gulf", Preliminary Staff Findings, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, United States Senate, 6 May 1994.
112. *Ibid.*, pp. 15+.
113. *Ibid.*
114. "Operation Desert Storm: Potential for Reproductive Dysfunction Is Not Being Adequately Monitored", Statement of Kwai-Cheung Chan, Issue Area Director, Program Evaluation and Methodology Division, United States General Accounting Office, before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, 5 August 1994.